**Summary Notes from the October 14, 2010 meeting of the Statewide Virtual School Task Force**

**Senator Stanislawski** opened the meeting, welcomed the task force members, and reviewed the recently enacted and pending legislation affecting education, including Senate Bill 2319.

State Superintendent of Schools **Sandy Garrett** was the first to speak; she outlined :

* her vision for the future of learning as “blended learning” with the educator’s role being to manage learning and lower barriers to uniform access while insuring accountability and helping students succeed
* growth in students’ using virtual learning options in Oklahoma, in particular those being served by the White Oak school district
* challenges posed by students who wish to avail themselves of the online opportunities while at the same time retain their access to participation in local school activities such as sports, band, etc

She described the following challenges to her department:

* making online instruction available to students in all districts through the use of technology
* establishing a framework whereby State DOE would review applications from online delivery providers similar to the way a textbook committee reviews texts.

OOCP is the title of the document created by her team to provide a framework for virtual learning. Her description of the framework included:

* Schools must provide each student opportunity for online learning
* Districts choose the provider, programs, etc.
* State provides funding, accountability, structure, guidelines, & caps amount of costs per student per year
* School day definition will change-new paradigm is required
* BOE desires to re-frame the term Carnegie units (seat-time vs. log-in time not necessarily interchangeable)
* Student eligibility & scheduling captured and tracked by BOE Student Information System
* Admissions process same with exception of ILP for those choosing a virtual learning option
* Transferability would be enhanced
* Enrollment period will be ongoing - 15 day transfer window applies
* Vendors will be paid for student successful completion of coursework, not enrollment
* Adopt SREB guidelines for online learning (Quality Matters Rubric?) as the standard
* upon review, online learning providers would be placed on an “approved” list
* districts could purchase Virtual Learning services for students in their district only from approved providers
* All teachers working for ”approved” providers would be required to hold Oklahoma teacher certification
* Classroom capacities would be maintained
* Students could not transfer their virtual learning options “out of district”
* districts would convene and ILP (Individualized Learning Plan)team to determine ability to benefit & appropriateness for individual student
* ILP Team includes school officials, parents, student, classroom teacher, administrator, counselor
* Local Boards of Education should balance the needs of the learner with the desires of the learner
* Transcripts must reflect letter grades vs. Pass/fail
* OLL’s must meet mandated attendance requirements.
* OL course providers must provide evidence of daily attendance
* Evidence of student-teacher interaction standards are min. of 5 contacts per 7 day period. Attendance requirement designed to ensure fairness between online students and traditional students as a basis for participation in school provided activities (i. e. sports)
* Schools can utilize up to 75% of state aid (ADA) for virtual learning costs, retaining 25% for F2F costs.

At this point, **Sen. Stanislawski** stated, “Pace or On-Pace is evidence of attendance. What about the pace for students not interested in participating in school sponsored activities? Pace should be the measuring stick, not participation in activities.” In summarizing the morning session, he went on to state the proposed framework presented a different standard for online learning providers - payment for success vs. payment for access, which is not fair and equitable. He indicated accountability is key, the document (framework) captures the spirit of SB 2319, and feels it provides a good foundation for building a virtual education structure.

In the afternoon session, **Myk Garn**, Director of SREB’s Education Technology Cooperative, presented his organization’s perspective on online learning by opening with this statement: “Virtual learning is either the biggest problem facing education today or the biggest opportunity to transform education in our lifetime.”

Mr. Garn presented these points to the members of the task force:

* Shift is occurring in where learning content and skills practice are obtained
* The real “work” of learning is working with content (PRACTICE)
* Teachers must become coaches, not lecturers
* There is no significant difference in virtual learning and Face to Face (F2F) learning, EXCEPT virtual learners learn the content in half the time
* Digital learning is socially based, digitally rich, and un-tethered
* Digital learners want unfettered access to their own technology or current technology, reliable hardware, ample bandwidth, more electrical outlets
* Demand is increasing exponentially; currently we are at 4% - 5% in K-12; higher ed is at 18%-20%.
* 15 of 16 SREB states have statewide virtual learning options
* SREB states have 80% of all K-12 online learners nationwide
* Mississippi has outsourced its virtual learning programs
* Virtual Learning costs? $160M total across SREB states
* How is accountability handled? Varies, state to state
* How is it succeeding? Very well, based on student performance
* The leading provider of VL content for K-12 is State Universities
* Virtual schools benefit from a unified, statewide approach. Not all districts can or should produce their own solutions
* What is driving virtual learning? Demand, Economics, Competition, and Policies
* With 5% market penetration, market value of VL in SREB states is $8.5B; by 2018, that will be $34B
* Who is providing hybrid learning? Post-Secondary (colleges & universities)
* Local school districts are beginning to become very active in creating their own HYBRID courses / content (eg.TTC).

**SUMMARY of Myk Garn’s presentation:** Virtual learning is becoming more ubiquitous. It should be integrated into the form and function of all local school districts. State-level initiatives have served to design and drive the change. Virtual learning is currently fragmented and fluid, but it is nonetheless tsunamic. Can the state centralized locus of control be maintained? From MG’s experience and SREB research, no, not for long. The Florida Virtual School structure for VL distribution was held up as a model for expansion, growth, diversity, and driving change. Should a policy-driving and policy-making division be managing day-to-day operations for teaching and learning? Short answer is NO. Oversight of VL still requires a large block of time and resources. Scalable solutions for funding virtual schools are essential for all states. Local school districts will require (demand) freedom to pursue their own, personalized solutions to meet the VL needs of their constituents. We can’t mandate consistency; we must learn to manage diversity. We must think and plan strategically, disseminate data quickly to students and parents, and avoid building parallel systems. All students need hybrid learning opportunities. All students need on-line course options. Some students need virtual learning. In a time of drastic change, it is the learners who will inherit the future. The learned will find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists.

At this point the question was posed by **Robert Franklin**: ” Before we rush in and become seduced by the technology, is there definitive research out there that clearly indicates digital learning is the way to go?

Myk Garn: “No.”

After a brief break, Sen. Stanislawski introduced **Susan Patrick,** President and CEO of iNACOL, the International Association for K-12 Online Learning.

Ms. Patrick opened by stating her organization is launching a web site on “how to start a virtual school”. The organization’s training reflects the shift from states focusing agency attention on managing VL to school districts focusing local resources on managing VL. In further describing her work and the association she directs, she stated:

* iNACOL - 5 years ago; 500 members (mostly state agency staff); today 3500 members, mostly district staff.
* 28 states currently have state virtual schools, compared with last year, when 32 states had virtual schools
* 25 states have chartered virtual schools with 225,000 enrollments.
* 82% of school districts offer at least one online course
* 4% of k-12 students take advantage of VL classes
* POLICIES and FUNDING MODELS are critical to the success of the virtual learning program
* states where the VL programs are most successful are set up so the MONEY FOLLOWS the STUDENT
* For EQUITY and ACCESS, making Virtual Learning part of the funding formula is ESSENTIAL
* State Departments of Ed. should focus on Accountability and Oversight, allowing local districts to focus on operations
* VL is characterized by OPEN ENROLLMENT, NO ENROLLMENT CAPS, and NO GEOGRAPHIC BARRIERS.

Sen. Stanislawski asked, “SB 2109 mandates money follow the student. Who appoints the membership on boards in states that have statewide VL provider authorizers?” Susan Patrick replied, “ Authorizers need to be professionals familiar with the Quality Matters Rubric and criteria, Learning Management Systems functionality and interoperability with Student Information Systems. Not every state has the same framework structure and accountability. We are beginning to see many states going to low-cost options to address VL needs. Computer-based LMS have advantages that are not always present in traditional F2F classroom and time-based systems, such as early intervention due to continuous self-diagnostic practices. Michigan, by statute, requires students to take an online class to graduate.

The following line of questions and responses served to carry the meeting through to its conclusion at 4:00 PM:

Sandy Garrett: “What kind of indicators are you looking for to evaluate VL systems and providers?”

Susan Patrick: “Student performance data, entry and exit, including performance growth indicators.”

Sen. Stanislawski: “Is there a Mastery learning definition or model?”

Susan Patrick: “Western Governors University presents a mastery based learning model. Florida Virtual School also. We are dedicated to advancing every student’s right to online learning. Reliance on seat time is the number one barrier.”

Robert Franklin: “Which Universities have good training/re-training programs to equip teachers for this environment?”

Susan Patrick: “Boise State, Michigan State, University of Wisconsin, University of Central Florida. Our research indicates the average teacher experience for VL teachers is 8 years. “

Rep. Kern: “ How are the virtual schools structured in terms of boards or governance? “

Susan Patrick / Myk Garn: “They are all over the board in terms of their make-up. Some structures are mandated by statute, others are more open.”

Senator Stanislawski concluded the meeting with a review of the schedule of upcoming meetings, adding that the meeting room for the next three meetings (October 28, November 11 and November 17) will be changed to Room 538A.